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Deposited in DRO:

18 June 2019

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Waugh, D. (2015) 'Primary education in England.', in Education in the United Kingdom. London: Bloomsbury , pp. 9-34. Education.

Further information on publisher's website:

https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/education-in-the-united-kingdom-9781472525314/

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Chapter 1 in Brock, C.(Ed) (2015)

***Education in the UK,* London and New York, Bloomsbury.* (pre-publication draft)**

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

David Waugh

A primary school teacher, transported from 1976, when the present author began teaching, to a 2015 English primary school, would clearly be taken aback by the presence of interactive whiteboards, PCs, laptops and tablets, but would probably, initially at least, find himself in fairly familiar surroundings. Now, as then, most children wear school uniform, sit at tables in classes of around 25-30, have a school day of around six and a half hours, and a curriculum which focuses strongly on English and mathematics. However, the initial comforting familiarity might disappear as the 1976 teacher discussed with his 2015 colleagues the nature of the curriculum, the governance of the school, and the regime of testing endured by pupils. He could also be alarmed to hear of an organisation called Ofsted which might inspect the school at one day's notice.

This chapter will explore the developments in primary education in England which have led to the current situation. Our 1976 teacher's training would have been influenced, perhaps, by the 1967 Plowden Report (DES, 1967) and possibly the 1975 Bullock Report (DES. 1975). He would almost certainly be used to having considerable autonomy over both what and how he taught. Unless his school specifically forbade it, he may have been able to use corporal punishment on his pupils, and he probably did little science with them beyond nature study. This chapter will examine the way in which primary education has evolved since 1976, and will try to explain why our 1976 teacher would be expected to work in a different way if he were to work in a 2015 English primary school.

Changing Primary Schools

Before 1979, governments had sought to control what happened in schools through HMI and local education authorities (LEAs). The efficacy of the *licensed autonomy* (Woods et al, 1997) which this allowed schools could be checked through inspections, but these were infrequent and HMI were limited by their lack of personnel and by their perceived role as advisors rather than inspectors. LEAs were often Labour-controlled in urban areas and the Conservative Government was sceptical about their efficiency and political motivation. It was clear to many politicians in the 1970s and 1980s that schools had retained autonomy to such an extent that educational provision was diverse without being successful in meeting the needs of children or industry. Duncan Graham, former Chair of the National Curriculum Council, wrote of thousands of well-intentioned educators in the 1960s and 1970s "concerned together in a benign conspiracy, reinventing thousands of wheels a day" (Graham, 1993, p.1). Schools, according to Graham, became "hooked on some perfectly respectable philosophies" (ibid.) some of which became ends in themselves rather than contributing to a balanced curriculum.

The Governments of Thatcher, Major and Blair may have felt able to justify the limited consultation offered for educational reforms by referring to the attempts of their predecessors to introduce changes in education. Expensive and well-publicised reviews of education (Plowden, DES, 1967; Bullock, DES, 1975; DES, 1978) had made recommendations in the past, but many schools had merely paid lip-service to these and had continued to operate in ways which suited them. The imposition of a statutory curriculum, with testing and assessment and external inspection, may have seemed the only way to ensure that reforms were actually implemented. There had been a feeling among some politicians and commentators that schools had hitherto been run for the convenience of teachers rather than for the benefit of pupils. The 1979 Thatcher Government, therefore, took steps to create radical changes in the ways in which schools operated. It faced

considerable criticism for the way in which reforms were implemented, but the Government's intransigence may be viewed in the context of the failure of previous attempts at reform. As Fullan (1991, p.274) argued:

> "Governments can't win. If they encourage widespread debate during the development phase, the policy gets delayed and the discussions bog down in abstract goals (not on what changes in practice are at stake). By the time the new guideline hits the streets it may be discredited for some and insufficiently developed for others."

The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) threatened the consensual approach to education policy which had involved government, LEA associations and teacher unions. The work of the Schools Council from the 1960s and the Assessment of Performance Unit from 1975 provided the first indications of the coming national curriculum and the monitoring processes which were to accompany it. Intervention by government in areas which had previously been the preserve of LEAs and schools was further developed through the Education White Paper of 1972 (DES, 1972), which set out national objectives for education. By the time James Callaghan made his Ruskin College speech in 1976, there was growing disquiet about the education system. The early 1980s saw a succession of publications on the curriculum (for example, DES 1985a; 1985b) which led to the claim by Brighouse (1986, cited in Williams, 1995) that the combined DES/HMI output between 1976 and 1986 exceeded the entire published output from government on the curriculum during the previous century.

Public perceptions of the purposes of education and the administrative and professional means of delivering it had changed over a period of time since the *Black Papers* began to be published in 1969 (Cox and Dyson, 1969). Although the picture of primary schools as being imbued with the spirit of Plowden was never one which reflected what actually happened in most schools (see, for example, Bennett, 1976, 1980; Galton et al, 1980), public opinion had been fed by politicians of the New Right such as Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education from 1981. Joseph's contribution to the radical reforms which were introduced after he had left office was, according to Maclure (1988, p.161), "a heightened public anxiety", as he dwelt upon what he regarded as the shortcomings of the education system.

Changes in the culture of schools were required if the reforms were to be successful, and the groundwork for this was prepared in advance of the 1988 ERA. The research of Professor Sig Prais (Prais and Wagner, 1983), which compared British pupils' mathematical performance unfavourably with that of German pupils; and the pronouncements of ministers, contributed to a climate in which change was both expected and demanded in many quarters. The changes to the culture of primary schools, which were evident after the 1988 Act, were substantial. However, as Maclure (1988, pp.149-150) pointed out: "What is clear on examination is that the received wisdom and the established verities had been undermined over a period of time, not suddenly in 1987".

Maclure drew attention to the views of Sir William Pile, Permanent Secretary at the DES from 1970 to 1976, who "had wondered aloud to a visiting team from OECD 'whether the Government could continue to disbar itself' from what had been termed "the secret garden" of the curriculum" (Maclure, 1988, p.158). The hands off approach to education which British governments adopted was exemplified in an episode of BBC Television's *Yes, Prime Minister* in which PM Hacker's desire to make radical changes was tempered by his civil servants who pointed out the impracticalities associated with interfering with the education system. The programme, remarkably, was first broadcast in January 1988 only six months before the introduction of the most radical changes to education since the Second World War. This suggests that a perception remained, despite some of the initiatives of the 1980s, that education was not to be meddled with by government.

Educational Reforms

The educational reforms of the Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997 can be seen as stemming from concerns expressed by the Labour prime minister, James Callaghan, in his 1976 Ruskin College speech. This speech, in which Callaghan questioned many educational orthodoxies, is often cited as the catalyst for much that followed. Young (1998, p.100), for example, asserted that:

> "Since Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976, the economic role of education has undoubtedly taken precedence, at least in the minds of policy makers and politicians, over its role in the personal and intellectual development of young people"

It is, perhaps, this increased preoccupation with the economic value of education which shaped future reforms and which ensured that the terminology of the market place (*value for money, consumers, relevance of the curriculum to the workplace* etc.) would become a feature of documentation.

The 1988 Act gave the Secretary of State for Education more than 400 new powers (Judd and Crequer, 1993), with the Government taking control of the curriculum, and encouraging schools to opt out of local authority control and receive finances from the Funding Agency for Schools rather than the local education authorities. LEAs were also less able to control admissions to schools, as the Government strove to foster parental choice. Control of large proportions of budgets was delegated to schools through Local Management of Schools (LMS), although small schools were, initially, exempted from this.

Lawton (1992) set the changes in context when he wrote of what he regarded as the traditional qualities of British primary schools:

> "At their best, English primary schools have served as a model for many other societies. At their best, they were - and are - superb" (p.118).

However, he acknowledged that a succession of reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), together with other evidence in the 1970s and 1980s, highlighted a number of problems. The neglect of certain aspects of the curriculum such as science, history and geography, and the lack of progress of some very able children, along with occasional lack of provision for children with special educational needs, led the popular press and some politicians to blame what they described as *progressive* methods. Lawton did, however, aver that the available evidence presented a much more complex picture, and he pointed out that:

> "...the fact that many parents send their children to state primary schools but use private secondary schools, must indicate a higher degree of satisfaction at the primary stage, although there is sometimes a suspicion of a lack of "stretching" for more able primary pupils." (ibid., pp. 119)

An alternative interpretation of this phenomenon could be that parents feel that secondary education is more important than primary, since career-affecting examinations are taken, and they are prepared to pay in the hope that their children will be successful. Whatever the case, the vast majority of children have continued to attend state primary schools (94.6% of 5 to 10-year-olds in 2013 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2013)) and there has been considerable concern about their standards of attainment expressed by politicians, the media and by some academics and inspectors for many years.

The changes to the curriculum, and to the ways in which state schools were to be managed, were considerable and in excess of what seemed likely only a few years earlier. As Maclure, (1998, p.13) commented:

> “The proverbial visitor from Mars - or even Sweden which puts a premium on neatness and tidiness - would have found the pre-Education Reform Act situation hard to credit. Curriculum control in primary schools rested largely with headteachers; only where selective secondary schools remained, were the primary schools constrained in part by 11-plus tests. As comprehensive education spread, this constraint disappeared and primary headteachers used their own judgement, tempered by the guidance of advisers and inspectors, to determine what should be taught and how.”

This laissez-faire approach to the curriculum was anathema to the Conservative Government, which subsequently summed up its approach to education and society in general with its *Back to Basics* slogan. A strong emphasis on what was often termed a *golden age*, when children were seated in rows and learned multiplication tables by rote, was a feature of the Major government’s pronouncements in the 1990s, and the term *traditional* seemed to be sprinkled liberally over every ministerial speech. Successive Secretaries of State for Education made attempts to address the issue, but the DES had, in 1983, hinted at what was to come in a paper on curricular provision in secondary schools:

> "It seemed essential that *all* pupils should be guaranteed a curriculum of distinctive breadth and depth to which they should be *entitled*, irrespective of the type of school they attend or their level of ability or their social circumstances and that failure to provide such a curriculum is unacceptable." (DES, 1983, p.38)

However, when Secretary of State, Sir Keith Joseph, issued *Better Schools* (DES, 1985b), it still did not seem that the reforms would be as far-reaching as they eventually were. For example, Sir Keith's words in 1985 (DES, 1985, pp.11-12) did not suggest that the Government was contemplating the dramatic changes to the curriculum which were imposed only three years later:

> "...it would not in the view of the Government be right for the Secretary of State's policy for the range and pattern of the five to sixteen curriculum to amount to the determination of national syllabuses for that period...The Government does not propose to introduce legislation affecting the powers of the Secretaries of State in relation to the curriculum."

The Education Reform Act was, however, to have a profound effect upon schools and to legislate far beyond the level which Sir Keith had anticipated. In particular, it:

- made teachers more accountable by strengthening the powers of governors and parents;
- supported teacher appraisal;
- devolved budgets and gave schools greater autonomy over spending;
- allowed for open enrolment which, in theory at least, allowed parents greater choice;
- introduced a national curriculum for all state schools.

Pierson (1998) argued that the goals of Tory education reforms lacked consistency and that conflicts arose between aims:

> “On the one hand, there was the libertarian logic of allowing consumers to choose the educational service they wanted and, on the other, the wish to reimpose a traditional

curriculum, 'traditional' teaching methods and an education service which met 'the overall needs of the economy'." (p.131)

Chitty, (1997) maintained that "The 1988 Act sought to erect (or reinforce) a hierarchical system of schooling subject both to market forces and to greater control from the centre" (p.53), while Maclure (1998, p.6) set out the view that the reforms were intended to set a new political agenda for education:

> "The radical Right set out to remove any ambiguity about the locus of power by formally abandoning the century-old idea that authority should be shared between central and local government. The related ambiguity about who was responsible for the curriculum was also removed: the introduction of a National Curriculum made Parliament the arbiter of what is to be taught."

Those who argued for the market principle to be adopted in education felt that the professionals had, for too long, acted in their own interests rather than those of the consumers according to Hartley (1997), who maintained that the Government, rather than the educationalists, came to determine what the product would be in education and that:

> "Once the national curriculum was in place, then standardized assessment could follow, thereby providing the results which would allow (customers) parents to compare schools." (p.138)

Before the eleven plus virtually ceased to exist, parents were able to look at schools' pass rates to do this. The intervening period had not provided a similar indicator, but the ERA-introduced standardised assessment tests (SATs) and inspection reports provided replacements.

The Government's radical changes amounted to *restructuring* according to Woods et al (1997). This restructuring has involved the *marketization of schooling* (Ball, 1994). Ball (1990) described five aspects of educational policy which acted upon the educational system in Britain:

- *Privatisation* has involved selling off elements of educational services including putting services out to private tender and increased reliance upon parental contributions to fund school activities.
- *Marketisation* has been introduced through measures such as open enrolment and LMS which have induced competition between schools.
- *Differentiation* has involved the creation of different types of schools such as grant maintained and city technology colleges.
- *Vocationalisation* has focused schools' attentions on the need to satisfy the needs of industry for a suitable workforce.
- *Proletarianisation* (see Apple, 1987) of teachers has resulted from their increasing distance from decision making and their decreased opportunities for choice and creativity.

At the same time as the Government introduced measures which amounted to decentralisation, it also instituted a considerable element of centralisation by imposing a national curriculum to be followed by all state schools in England and Wales.

As announcements of changes were made, teachers were often portrayed in the media, including by members of the Government, as inadequate or guilty of failing their pupils. Galton et al (1999, p.15) described 'scare stories' about poor teaching which served to heighten public feeling that change was necessary. Hargreaves (1994, p.xiv) summed up the Government's attitude to teachers:

> "In England and Wales, policymakers tend to treat teachers rather like naughty children; in need of firm guidelines, strict requirements and a few short sharp evaluative shocks to keep them up to the mark."

The virtual vilification of teachers from some sources (for example Lawlor, 1990), which Ball (1990) describes as 'a discourse of derision', may have been counter-productive. Certainly, many teachers left the profession, taking early retirement or making career changes, during the 1990s. By 2000, the Government was offering at least £6000 to each postgraduate trainee in both primary and secondary initial teacher training in a bid to counter growing teacher shortages. Teaching appeared to be an increasingly unattractive career option for graduates and the often expressed disaffection and disillusionment of serving teachers, allied to the need to cope with constant changes to working practices, often with little or no consultation, may have been as significant as increased opportunities for work in industry in deterring people from entering the profession. The OECD (1989) argued that "…educational reforms, no matter how they are conceived in principle, will only be fortuitous if the teachers who are actually responsible are not made an explicit and pivotal plank of these reforms." (cited in Fullan and Hargreaves, A, (eds) 1992b, p.50)

However, the reforms were imposed by statute and little cognisance was taken of the opinions of those who would deliver them in schools. The values and cultures of schools were seen to be flawed and the Government pressed ahead with its reforms. MacDonald (in Altrichter and Elliott, 2000) criticised the changes introduced by government since 1979 and stated:

> "It would be difficult to overstate the extent to which these reforms constituted a repudiation of the values, aspirations and organizations which had hitherto powered the post-war expansion and modernization project." (p.22)

The nature of the reforms was debated within the Conservative Party as well as outside it, with Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, effectively winning the day and promoting his own scheme in the face of hostility from Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (see Taylor 1999 for reminiscences of HMI and DES officials at the time). As Bush (1999, p.241) maintained:

> "The main legislative changes reflected a fundamental contradiction between the centralizing wing of the Conservative Party and those from the 'new right' who advocate a substantial degree of autonomy for schools and maximum competition between them in order to increase their responsiveness and hence raise standards."

The principle elements of the ERA are discussed below.

The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum was intended to counter "the mismatch between the output of schools and the needs of the labour market" (Gipps,1993, p.38). To achieve the changes it required, the Government acquired control of the curriculum, which had traditionally been the province of local education authorities and schools.

The statutory, Government-defined, curriculum was implemented in stages from the autumn of 1990. The core subjects of English, mathematics and science were in place first, with seven other foundation subjects following (six in primary schools where modern foreign languages were not compulsory). Initially, each subject was defined in an individual document and pupils were to work at one of ten different levels of attainment, with their progress being assessed by teachers and by external SATs. Programmes of study outlined

what was to be taught and attainment targets defined the range of knowledge, skills and understanding which children were expected to acquire at different stages of their school careers. Richards (1993) asserted that this was the first time since the withdrawal of the elementary school regulations in 1926 that primary schools had been required to plan and deliver curricula which were largely legally specified.

The National Curriculum was not intended to be the complete school curriculum, and other cross-curricular themes such as health education, environmental education and economic awareness were also to be studied (see DES, 1989, 3.3-3.9).

It soon became apparent that the implementation of the National Curriculum had resulted in an overloaded timetable and in 1993 Sir Ron Dearing was asked to review and revise the curriculum. Basini (1996, p.2) sums up the criticism of the National Curriculum and its content and implementation:

> "Critics suggested that there had not been sufficient consultation, especially with teachers; that the curriculum structure was an obsolete grammar school type subject-based one that neglected important areas such as political awareness; and that there was excessive bureaucracy, overload of content and assessment procedures."

There were concerns from the outset that the curriculum for primary schools was too subject-centred and had more in common with the secondary curriculum than with what had been taught in primary schools in the previous twenty years. Indeed, the composition of the National Curriculum was compared by Goodson (1995) with that of the Secondary Regulations of 1904. He demonstrated this by listing the two curricula side by side:

1904	*1987*
English	English
Maths	Maths
Science	Science
History	History
Geography	Geography
Physical Education	Physical Education
Drawing	Art
Foreign Language	Modern Foreign Language
Manual Work	
Domestic Subjects	Technology
(Music added soon afterwards)	Music

(pp.203-204)

The similarities led Goodson to question "the rhetoric of 'a new initiative'" and to assert that the National Curriculum could be seen "as a victory of the forces and intentions" (pp.204-5) of the political Right.

Moon and Mortimore (1989, p.9) argued that the primary curriculum was presented in restricted terms: "... as if it were no more than a pre-secondary preparation (like the worst sort of 'prep school')".

The extent of the subject range raised questions about schools' abilities to deliver such a broad curriculum with a teaching force which was felt to lack subject knowledge in some areas. Indeed, even before the final documents had been produced, the Cox Report (DES, 1989), which was the forerunner of the English National Curriculum, had maintained that courses for children in knowledge about language were not being recommended and that this was partly because:

> "...substantial programmes of teacher training are required if teachers are themselves to know enough to enable them to design with confidence programmes of study about language." (6.3)

Interestingly, there were few similar expressions of concern about teachers' subject knowledge when the National Literacy Strategy was being developed eight years later, and this demanded a far greater knowledge of linguistic metalanguage than the National Curriculum for English. The 2013 National Curriculum demanded still more linguistic terminology to be understood and taught by teachers, and it was set against the backdrop of a statutory spelling, punctuation and grammar test for all Year 6 pupils.

The concerns about teachers' abilities to teach aspects of English, a core subject, are significant, but there were further worries about teachers' subject knowledge in areas such as science and technology (see Galton and Patrick, 1990 and Leverhulme Project (Wragg, Bennett and Carré, 1993)).

There was, then, considerable support in many quarters for a more structured approach to education. However, the implementation of the National Curriculum was fraught with difficulties. Each subject's curriculum was designed by a committee of people with a vested interest in ensuring that coverage would be comprehensive. As a result, the curriculum became overloaded. As Maclure (1998, p.13) commented: "The creation of a broad and balanced National Curriculum was undertaken at break-neck pace without adequate time for preparation and planning".

Young (op cit.) wrote of a "policy of over-specification of outcomes and little consultation with teachers" leading to a curriculum which monitored schools' achievements, but offered "few incentives for teachers to take more responsibility for raising achievement in their schools" (p.85).

Despite the prescriptive nature of the National Curriculum, no attempt was made at first to influence teaching methods, but by 1992 Alexander, Rose and Woodhead ('The Three Wise Men') had been commissioned to report on curriculum organisation and classroom practice, and had recommended more 'whole-class' teaching and less time spent on 'topic work'. The trend towards such an approach was identified by Pollard et al (1994), but the report suggested that further changes were necessary.

The Dearing Report (1993) was the Government's response to growing discontent among educators. Galton and Fogelman (1998) saw the Report as the Government's attempt to solve some of the problems which had arisen because of curriculum overload and a growing rebellion, particularly among secondary English teachers, over testing and assessment which culminated in many teachers refusing to administer SATs in 1993. According to Galton and Fogelman (p.120):

> "From the outset it was clear that the purpose of the Dearing report was not to evaluate the Government's National Curriculum strategy but to find ways of reducing teachers' workloads and of solving the impasse over the schemes of assessment"

Intending to slim down the curriculum and streamline testing arrangements, Dearing (1993, p.61) clearly recognised many of the above criticisms when commenting:

"..we have created an over-elaborate system which distorts the nature of different subjects, which serves to fragment teaching and learning in that teachers are planning work from the statements of attainment, and which has at times reduced the assessment process to a meaningless ticking of boxes."

However, while the curriculum had proved problematical for schools, they also had to face the challenge of assuming greater responsibility for the management of their finances.

Local Management of Schools (LMS)

Parents were, following the ERA, often described as *consumers*, with schools being the *producers* who offered their services in a competitive market. The concept of the market place was further enhanced by the devolution of substantial responsibility for financial management to schools at the expense of LEAs. Howells (in Williams, 1995) asserts that LMS challenged the culture of primary education:

"The thrust of LMS is that schools should be more businesslike, more competitive, concentrating on image and public relations, satisfied customers and measured products, marketable in the nation's economy, risking bankruptcy, avoiding co-operation and insisting on only the best quality raw materials. Such business objectives bear little relation to the agreed aims of most schools." (pp.54-55)

Howells went on to argue that the LMS was "a political device to put on to other shoulders the responsibility for making unpopular decisions about cuts and economies" at a time when educational spending was being cut. LMS also served to individualise schools and created a climate of rivalry for pupil numbers in many areas. The introduction of LMS led Bullock and Thomas (1997) to identify a paradox in the Tory Government's education policies. The decentralisation of the control of resources which enabled schools, through LMS, to take greater responsibility for the management of their finances could be seen as an example of devolving power to individuals and small units, while: "...the centralization of control over the curriculum would appear to be contrary to the market principle and more consistent with the principles underlying planned economies" (p.211).

Whitty (1989, p.330), too, discussed the "contradiction within an Act which increasingly gave market forces their head...yet suddenly introduced prescription into one area of education where hitherto there had been autonomy". However, Webb and Vulliamy (1996b) argued that while heads complained about excessive administrative burdens, most welcome the ability to make decisions about financial management as a result of the introduction of LMS. This view is borne out by the responses of many of the headteachers who were interviewed as part of the present study.

Downes (op cit.) identified three features of LMS which were attractive to headteachers:

- Greater flexibility to use resources effectively rather than being "hide-bound by externally determined staffing limits and allocations for capitation, or centrally decided maintenance plans" (p.26)
- The incentive to be cost-effective so that money saved could be used to promote the delivery of good education.
- The sense of autonomy which lifted heads' morale.

Howells (op cit., 1995) discussed the growing significance of age-weighted pupil numbers (AWPU) in making schools compete with each other for "clients": something which, he

argued, the Government encouraged. He asserted: "These were not major issues for headteachers a generation ago, but we ignore them today at our peril" (p.45).

The culture and climate of education was changing and with the change came a new vocabulary. A key word in the lexicon of the 1988 National Curriculum was *entitlement*. Every child was to be entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum which was similar in every school in the country. However, schools which could attract more pupils would be better off financially and therefore be likely to be able to deliver the curriculum using better resources.

Local Education Authorities

The declining role of LEAs, which accompanied devolution of finances to schools, reduced one of the support systems which schools had previously enjoyed. Humberside LEA, for example, was particularly proactive in helping its schools to implement the National Curriculum from 1988. When the first documents appeared, the LEA held a series of three-day conferences for key trainers within each of its schools and strongly suggested that schools adopt a cross-curricular approach to delivery based around five key elements of the science curriculum. Advisors recognised that science was probably the most neglected area within schools and that if it was to be incorporated into the syllabus it should be at the heart of the curriculum. As the demands of the National Curriculum became more apparent, the LEA backed away from this approach insisting that it had never intended to be prescriptive about the strategy for curriculum delivery. Advisors then promoted an approach in which each lesson should be focused upon a single National Curriculum subject, with any other subjects being covered incidentally during the lesson.

The LEA did, therefore, provide a stimulus for change and through its internal inspection service and its influence over career advancement it was able to make schools accountable to it. Gradually, however, schools moved towards their own diverse approaches to delivering the curriculum and felt increasingly accountable to Ofsted and to parents as inspections became regular and league tables of SATs results began to be published. Nevertheless, as greater proportions of educational funds were devolved to schools at the expense of LEAs and schools became able to take up tenders from private companies for in-service and maintenance work, LEAs' importance declined. Many headteachers regretted this, feeling that a support system had been taken away from them. As Church (in Williams, 1995, p.29) maintained:

> "Individual schools and teachers are increasingly uncomfortable with values which they see as being unforgiving to the weak and to the disadvantaged. They want the LEA to be the referee – to act and persuade from its knowledge and wide experience across many schools of how such issues can be addressed. Above all, they reject isolationism and seek collaboration and partnership in what they do."

Nevertheless, the pressure groups of the New Right, which had a strong influence on the Government, tended to portray LEAs as local monopolies (Flew, 1987; Lawlor, 1989) which should be broken and which were perceived to be partly responsible for *progressive* educational practices. The 1993 Education Act (DfE, 1993) left LEAs with more limited functions, since it removed the requirement for them to have an education committee and set up a funding agency for schools opting out of LEA control.

Grant-Maintained Schools

The 1988 Act allowed schools to assume grant-maintained status by *opting out* of local authority control to receive funding directly from the Government. LEAs in which schools opted out were to have their budgets cut accordingly and the grant-maintained schools were to receive higher incomes than their LEA counterparts, since the element of funding which was allocated for LEA administration went directly to the schools. Thus, schools could determine which LEA services they wished to *buy in* and could, if they so wished, make use of alternative providers. Downes (op cit.) noted that the opportunity to opt for Grant

Maintained status was relished by some heads who were "unashamedly competitive (including a few who engineered significant pay rises for themselves in the process)" (p.28).

Maclure (1998) suggested that proposals to close a school or merge it with another would be likely to prompt moves to opt out of local authority control, since GM status represented a school's best chance of reprieve:

> "Local authorities have responded by bringing forward fewer reorganisation schemes and weighing carefully the possible consequences in terms of GM defections - if only because if one school is allowed to opt out, the balance of a reorganisation scheme may be radically altered." (p.19)

With changes in LEAs' roles and a redefined curriculum, educational changes had altered the educational landscape and had forced schools to consider new structures. Consultation had been minimal and heads and teachers often felt overwhelmed by the task of implementing the changes. Hargreaves, A (1994) maintained that the educational changes in Britain were extreme in terms of pace, extent of influence and "disrespect and disregard for teachers themselves" (p.6). He went on to argue that "In the political rush to bring about reform, teachers' voices have been largely neglected, their opinions overridden, and their concerns dismissed" (p.6).

New Labour 1997-2010

Tony Blair led the Labour Party to victory in the 1997 election stating that his three key priorities were "Education, education, education". New Labour, having before the election talked of an alternative curriculum "which values local flexibility and the professional discretion of teachers" (Labour Party, 1994), continued to deploy the prescriptive curriculum devised by the Conservatives. Indeed, it went on to introduce the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and National Numeracy strategy (NNS), which were more prescriptive than anything which had gone before. It came to office pledging to achieve literacy and numeracy targets for 11-year-olds by the end of its term of office in 2002, and stated its aims in simplistic terms redolent of the 0.Tories' 'back to basics' ethos. Every child was to be "taught to read, write and add up" (DfEE, 1997, p.9). The literacy and numeracy strategies were the big ideas which were to ensure that this happened.

Fullan (1999) describes the implementation of the NLS and NNS as being "...the most ambitious implementation strategy undertaken by a major government" (pp.58-59), since their goals are backed by implementation strategies which include "initial teacher training, professional development, local plans, assessment and feedback, family programs, national activities and the like" (p.58).

The local plans relate to targets rather than any account which those who devised the strategies might have taken of local contexts. However, the comprehensive nature of the educational change and the structures which accompanied it took mandated change to a new level. For the first time a style of pedagogy has been prescribed and it appeared from progress reports (Ofsted 1999) that teachers generally seem to have adopted it. It may be that teachers had become used to accepting edicts from outside agencies and no longer had the will or desire to oppose them. It is difficult to imagine that the NLS and NNS could have been implemented in the school culture which existed in 1976, and it may be that the Education Reform Act and other pieces of legislation laid the foundation for the more prescriptive changes which followed by changing the culture of primary schools. This susceptibility to change is illustrated by the fact that the NLS and NNS were not statutory as the National Curriculum was, but it appears that virtually all state schools adopted them.

Both New Labour and the Conservatives maintained control over curriculum content, but New Labour sought to influence pedagogy in a way that their predecessors never attempted. Davies and Edwards (1999) argued that both approaches had in common "a profound mistrust of teachers" (p.270). They suggested that the close control of teaching methods meant that we might view the literacy and numeracy hours "as the pedagogical equivalents of painting by numbers" (p.270).

The culture of primary education had changed as governments became progressively more daring in their introduction of educational changes. Changes were imposed as politicians became increasingly determined to challenge what was perceived to be a conservative educational establishment; an establishment which the 2010 Secretary of State Michael Gove named "The Blob". The changes have altered, in many ways, the nature of the curriculum and the ways in which schools are run. However, despite the radical elements of the changes, it is interesting to speculate as to whether the Government would have been able to introduce the NLS and NNS in the educational climate which existed before 1988, given the way in which pedagogy is prescribed. It may be that many educators have resigned themselves to having lost any battles which might be fought against change.

The New Labour government saw further changes to the primary curriculum, with the literacy and numeracy frameworks replacing the NLS and NNS and a greater emphasis being placed upon teachers choosing appropriate pedagogies. However, the Government did commission The Independent Review of Early Reading (The Rose Review) which, among other things, advocated the uses of systematic synthetic phonics as the prime approach for teaching early reading. The recommendation of the review set out best practice in the teaching of early reading and phonics including:

- clear guidance on developing children's speaking and listening skills;
- high quality, systematic phonic work as defined by the review should be taught;
- the knowledge, skills and understanding that constitute high quality work should be taught as the prime approach in learning to decode (to read) and encode (to write/spell) print;
- phonic work should be set within a broad and rich language curriculum that takes full account of developing the four interdependent strands of language: speaking, listening, reading and writing, and enlarging children's stock of words.

The recommendations of The Rose Review were adopted by the Labour Government and reinforced the Coalition Government. Systematic synthetic phonics is now a specific focus by Ofsted for the inspection of schools and teacher training providers, and in the Teachers' Standards in 2012, there is a specific statement that to gain qualified teacher status trainees should:

> *if teaching early reading, demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics. (DfE, 2011, para. 3)*

The strength of the research behind the Rose Review was questioned by many, including Wyse and Styles (2007), who maintained that "The Rose Report's conclusions are based on assertion rather than rigorous analysis of appropriate evidence…" and argued that there was a lack of attention to research evidence" (p.40). Nevertheless, Michael Gove, the soon-to-be-elected Secretary of State for education, was also a strong advocate of SSP, stating in 2009:

> "So we will provide training and support to every school in the use of systematic synthetic phonics - the tried and tested method of teaching reading which has eliminated illiteracy in Clackmannanshire and West Dunbartonshire." (Michael Gove speech – 6th November 2009)

The curriculum, however, continued to be a cause for concern and two major reviews of primary education were launched: the Cambridge Review sponsored by the Esme Fairburn Trust from 2004, and the Rose Review, not to be confused with Rose's reviews of reading and of dyslexia, sponsored by the Government from 2008. The former was led by Professor Robin Alexander (one of the "three wise men" of the 1992 report) and was "an independent review led by academics, guided by a diverse and talented Advisory Committee" (Alexander, 2007, 190). It set out 'to establish from both official and independent sources exactly what has happened to the quality of primary education since defining educational quality became the prerogative of national government' (Alexander 2007:195). The Rose Review was conducted by Sir Jim Rose at the request of Secretary of State, Ed Balls, and was widely perceived as an attempt by the Government to undermine the Cambridge Review.

The publication of the Cambridge Review was brought forward to coincide with the publication of the Rose Review. Both reviews concluded that the curriculum was overcrowded and the Cambridge Review proposed a restructuring of the curriculum. However, the recommendations were never taken up by the government, which ended its term of office in 2010 by closing down the National Strategies and recommending a scaling down of the National Curriculum.

Primary Schools in England in 2014

In 2014, maintained schools within England must conform to government requirements regarding the format and content of education. A uniform model of education specifies a constrained curriculum and the ages at which different aspects should be studied. The National Curriculum published in 2013 looks substantially the same as those cited by Goodson earlier in this chapter, although the actual content of each subject has changed. Our 1976 teacher might be surprised to see some of the grammatical terminology which primary pupils are now expected to know and understand. For example, by the end of Year 3 they should know and understand: *adverb, preposition conjunction, word family, prefix, clause, subordinate clause , direct speech , consonant, consonant, letter* and *inverted commas*. Interestingly, the same constraints are not placed upon academies or free schools, although the fact that pupils will be examined in the same way as those in maintained schools will probably ensure a high degree of uniformity.

There has been a clear shift in power in primary education from local authorities to schools, with many of the latter deciding to become academies and so beyond the jurisdiction of local authorities, while maintained schools continue to have the freedom to opt in or out of local authority service packages. At the same time as schools have increased autonomy from LAs, they have become constrained by the league tables which show pupils' progress in relation to other schools. Competition between schools for pupils and funding, as well as the constant threat of a short notice Ofsted inspection means that schools strive constantly to improve SATs scores, sometimes in ways which, when exposed, lead to headteachers' careers ending amid scandal.

Central government now exerts far more control over primary education in England than in 1976 and Brundrett (2013, 121) argues that three interconnected issues are at the heart of the Coalition Government's educational agenda:

> "…the desire for increased autonomy for schools based on the academies programme; the move to school-based teacher training and the proposals for the revision of the national curriculum."

Brundrett maintains that these reforms continue:

> "… the overall theme of change since the 1980s which is to diminish the role of Local Authorities and Higher Education by enhancing the direct relationship between central government and individual schools within a competitive framework based on a quasi-market approach."

The view that current changes to primary schools are part of a continuum which involves successive governments building upon each other's reforms is taken up by Ball and Exley (2011, p.114):

> "While Ed Balls talked of primary school mergers and 'executive heads', Michael Gove has suggested celebrity advisers like Carole Vorderman and Goldie Hawn. Thus, to some extent Tory policy can be understood in terms of previous Labour policy, taking it further in particular directions by different means."

School performance

The performance of English pupils relative to those in other countries has continued to come under close scrutiny, with the Progress in international Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which measures 9-and 10-year-olds' literacy achievement every five years, being given particular attention. In 2006 and 2011, 215000 pupils in 45 countries were tested. The 2011 results showed that only five of the 45 countries' performance was significantly better than England's and that only two countries showed greater improvement between 2006 and 2011 (Higgins, 2013). England rose from 15th in 2006 to 11th in 2011 in international rankings, with its highest performing pupils attaining similar scores to the three top performers (Finland, Hong Kong and the Russian Federation). However, England's low attaining pupils scored less well than low attainers in other countries.

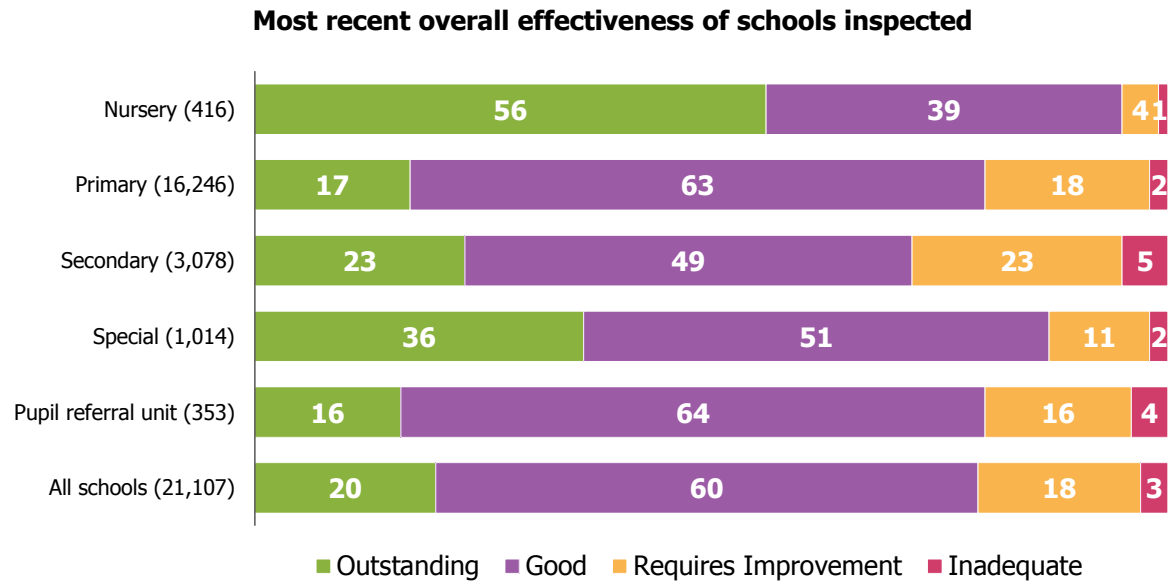
Ofsted statistics (Ofsted website: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/latest-official-statistics-maintained-school-inspections-and-outcomes. Accessed 27 March 2014) showed that by the end of 2013:

> "79% of open schools were judged to be good or better at their most recent inspection. This is a one percentage point rise since 31 August 2013. This compares with a rise of five percentage points in the same period in 2012 and one percentage point increase in 2011."

For primary schools, 80% are rated good or outstanding, with only 2% graded inadequate. Table 1 below is taken from Ofsted's Statistical Release of 13 March, 2014.

Table 1

Chart 4: Most recent overall effectiveness of maintained schools as at 31 December 2013 (provisional) [1 2 3 4 5 6]



Percentage of schools

1. Percentages in the chart are rounded and may not add to 100.

2. Based on Edubase at 3 January 2014.

3. Data includes the most recent judgements for predecessor schools of academy converters that have not converter.

4. From 1 September 2012 the judgment 'requires improvement' replaced the judgment 'satisfactory'.

5. Schools have been inspected under a number of different frameworks. The section 5 inspection framewo September 2005.

Subsequently amended frameworks have been introduced on 1 September 2009, 1 January 2012 and 1 S

6. These statistics exclude schools inspected during the quarter but where the inspection report had not be 2014.

For these schools the previous inspection is included.

While the PIRLS scores and Ofsted inspection outcomes do not suggest that primary education is in crisis, there is justifiable concern that some children may be underperforming in underperforming schools. A central plank of the Coalition government's attempts to reform education have involved expanding the number of teachers trained in schools: an interesting development given that a higher proportion of higher education trainers than school-based trainers were rated outstanding by Ofsted at the time the Coalition took office. The Chief Inspector's report (Ofsted, 2010, para 156, p.60) stated:

> "…the overall effectiveness of the very large majority of training programmes based in a higher education institution is good or better, with just under a half outstanding (30 out of 64). However, very few higher education providers offering training in more than one phase have been judged to be outstanding in all phases. For school-centred provision, the proportion that is outstanding is much lower than that found in higher education institutions."

Despite the inspectorate's findings, the Government has carried out its pledge to transfer the bulk of teacher training to schools and has also allowed free schools and academies to employ unqualified teachers. In addition, other routes into teaching have been developed, including *Teach First*, which enables graduates with first class degrees to teach after minimal training, and *Troops into Teaching*, which provides fast track teacher training for members of the armed services.

Our 1976 teacher's initial feeling that not much had changed in almost forty years might then have changed as he delved into the current state of primary education. The recently qualified teachers will have had to pass literacy and numeracy skills tests which have been made more challenging recently, and which have led to many candidates for courses being unable to take up their places. He will also find that there is a whole area of information technology which is new to him, but which children are confident about. Back in 1976 our teacher did not need a science qualification in order to secure a training place, but a minimum of GCSE science is now required. A glance at the curricula for science and mathematics would lead him to understand why he might, at the very least, need to look back at some of his notes for O level revision before attempting to teach the subjects.

A further change he will notice will be the presence of teaching assistants in many classrooms, some of whom take on whole-class teaching at times, often to enable teachers to engage in professional development. Such assistance was rare in 1976 and usually voluntary.

A discussion with the Headteacher will reveal that our teacher should expect to have his performance reviewed annually and that the outcome may influence his salary. He will also discover that parents are now represented on the Governing body and that governors have curricular responsibilities and may observe his teaching. He might also be intrigued by the school's website, mission statement and, perhaps, its glossy prospectus which is handed to every prospective parent.

However, perhaps one of the first changes he will have noticed, long before he looked at classrooms or spoke to colleagues, would be the challenge of actually entering the school. Levels of security have changed dramatically following well-publicised incidents, and even gaining access to the playground may have involved intercom communication. After surmounting that hurdle he would probably have had to press a buzzer and identify himself, before being allowed through the front door and being asked for his Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate to ensure that he did not have a criminal record which might make him an unwelcome visitor. He would then be given a badge to wear identifying him as a Visitor.

Conclusions

Gillard (2013, 406) sums up what he considers to be the Government's approach:

> "Education secretary Michael Gove talks a lot about 'freeing' schools from local authority control, when he knows perfectly well that the local authorities have no powers left from which schools can be 'freed'. He tells teachers they're real professionals doing a grand job, but never misses an opportunity to dictate exactly

what and how they should teach. Parents are told they are to have more choice, but when they choose not to have an academy foisted on them, they are ignored. When they object to the expansion of a grammar school, they are told they no longer even have the right to object. Governors are expected to exercise great responsibility, yet when they try to do so, they are overruled."

In 1976, Callaghan's Ruskin speech launched what was termed The Great Debate about education, which led ultimately to governments playing a much more active role in influencing the nature of that education. While this may come as a surprise to our 1976 teacher, whose union might have resisted such impositions, it is perhaps not so surprising that elected representatives should wish to have a strong say in how taxpayers' money is spent. Restricted or licensed autonomy may, therefore, be the best that English primary schools can expect forty years later.

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